

Theory of Representation: China and the West

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This thesis tries to explore the nature of Chinese Communists' claim to represent the people. Although China has never established a Western-style representative government based on elections, it has its own theory of representation. By comparing the Chinese theory with the theories about representation of Western thinkers such as the Liberals, Burke, and Rousseau, it can be found that although China's theory is different from the Liberal views, it has illuminating similarities with Burke's and Rousseau's theories. On the other hand, it contains distinctive characters, including the role of vanguard, and masses campaigns as means of representation.

Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgements	vi
1. Introduction	1
2. Tension between Independence and Responsiveness.....	4
3. Some Western Theories Concerning Representation	8
3.1 Liberals on Representation	8
3.2 Burke on Representation.....	11
3.3 Rousseau on Representation	13
4. Mao's Theory of Representation.....	15
4.1 Proletarian Vanguard: the Representatives	15
4.2 Virtuous People: the Represented	18
4.3 Masses Campaign: the Means of Representation.....	23
4.4 Further Considerations	27
5. Representation in Post-Mao China, and Its Critics	32
6. Conclusion	40
Bibliography	43

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1. Introduction

Based on direct, universal and regular elections, representative government is a widely accepted and adopted form of government in contemporary world, and political science has developed rich theories about it. The Communist Party of China and the Chinese government under its control are naturally identified as an authoritarian regime; however, although a representative form of government through elections has never been established, the single party regime has always claimed itself to be “representing” the Chinese people. As Mao Zedong said in 1957, “Our People's Government is one that genuinely represents the people's interests, it is a government that serves the people.”¹ As an important doctrine of the Party developed in 2000, the former General Secretary Jiang Zemin's Three Represents theory (*San ge dai biao*) goes as follows:

This experience and the historical experiences gained by the Party since its founding can be summarized as follows: Our Party must always represent the requirements for developing China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of

¹ “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People,” Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, accessed March 20, 2014, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_58.htm.

*China's advanced culture and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people. These are the inexorable requirements for maintaining and developing socialism, and the logical conclusion our Party has reached through hard exploration and great praxis.*²

According to Hannah Pitkin's definition, "Representation means the making present of something which is nevertheless not literally present."³

Although the Chinese Communists claim to represent, their concept of representation and the Western Liberal one are obviously not the same. Is their claim of representativeness purely hypocritical, or does it have some real meanings? How does the Chinese Communist theory of representation differ from the Western views? Does such theory have any similarity or resemblance with any Western ones? These are the questions this paper will endeavor to answer.

So far, only few literatures can be found which pay specific attention to the theoretical meanings of the Chinese Communist representation. Among them,

² "Three Represents," Wikipedia, accessed March 20, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Represents.

³ Hannah Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1972), 144.

“Mao’s Concept of Representation” by Phyllis Frakt is a representative paper. Although making illuminating comparisons between Mao’s theory and the Western ones, it has several shortcomings. One is that it does not pay enough attention to Mao’s unique mechanism for political participation. Also, due to the time when it was written (1979), it is unable to make analysis on the views of representation laid after Mao. Dramatic changes have occurred to the regime since Mao’s death, but the Communists’ claim of representativeness continues to exist. Some elements in their theory remained intact, some are changing, and some have had different meanings. This paper will investigate such thoughts through the speeches of the Communist leaders at various times. By making comparisons between them and theories of Western thinkers – the Liberals, Burke and Rousseau, this paper will try to understand the character of the Communist theory of representation in China.

2. Tension between Independence and Responsiveness

In *The Concept of Representation*, Hannah Pitkin makes a thorough research on representation from etymological, historical and theoretical aspects. She raises a question: “Should (must) a representative do what his constituents want, and be bound by mandates or instructions from them; or should (must) he be free to act as seems best to him in pursuit of their welfare?” According to her, this mandate-independence controversy is “undoubtedly the central classic controversy in the literature of political representation,” and “has become encrusted with a number of other issues, partly related but partly irrelevant.”¹

Pitkin elaborates the positions of the two sides as follows:

A highly restrictive mandate theorist might maintain that true representation occurs only when the representative acts on explicit instructions from his constituents, that any exercise of discretion is a deviation from this ideal. ...

*At the other extreme is the idea of complete independence, that constituents have no right even to exact campaign promises; once a man is elected he must be completely free to use his own judgment.*²

¹ Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 145.

² Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 146.

A mandate theorist will use analogies like “a ‘mere’ agent, a servant, a delegate, a subordinate substitute” for the represented to describe a representative, while an independence theorist will regard a representative as “a free agent, a trustee, an expert who is best left alone to do his work.”³ Although theorists always takes a standpoint either pro-mandate or pro-independence, neither of the two positions could be pushed to the extremes, otherwise neither of them could be an appropriate theory of representation. On the one hand,

The representative must have some freedom, some discretion to act, or it is difficult to imagine his constituency wholly present in him. If he is totally bound and instructed, we tend to think of him more as a tool or limb or puppet whose motivating or deciding power is elsewhere.

On the other hand,

*The representative cannot be persistently at odds with desires of his constituency, or else it is again too difficult to conceive the constituency as present in him. When they are at odds, we tend to think of him as a separate being acting on his own to pursue his own purpose.*⁴

³ Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 146-147.

⁴ Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 153.

As Pitkin points out, because the represented need to be both made present and not really present literally or fully in action, such a controversy cannot be really solved. It is between the two extremes that a theory of representation can stand: "What the representative does must be in his principal's interest, but the way he does it must be responsive to the principal's wishes. He need not actually and literally act in response to the principal's wishes, but the principal's wishes must be potentially there and potentially relevant."⁵ It is possible and necessary for a representative to independently pursue the public welfare and at the same time truly respond to the wishes of the represented, or, "to have a head in the clouds and keep an ear to the ground."⁶ It is essential for a representative to become neither a puppet or tool nor a self-serving oligarch.

Therefore, this paper regards the tension between the representative's independence from and his responsiveness to the represented as the key to understand various theories of representation. Any representation theory should

⁵ Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 155.

⁶ Phyllis M. Frakt, "Mao's Concept of Representation," *American Journal of Political Science* 23 (Nov., 1979): 689.

contain both independence and responsiveness, and must have its own way to handle the tension between them.

Pitkin reminds us that to recognize a theorist's position on this matter, we need to consider some important elements in his theory. First of all, what does he think should be represented – is it the objective interest, the subjective interest, or the persons? Second, how does he see the relative capacities of the representative and the represented – are they distinctively different or basically equal? And finally, what is the nature of the issues that the representatives deal with – are they questions requiring certain knowledge or choices about personal preferences? “All these elements ... contribute to defining a theorist's position on the continuum between a ‘taking care of’ so complete that it is no longer representation, and a ‘delivering their vote’ so passive that it is at most a descriptive ‘standing for.’”⁷

⁷ Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 214.

3. Some Western Theories Concerning Representation

We should first examine some of the most influential theories concerning representation by such Western thinkers as the Liberals, Edmund Burke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Their views on the topic are very different and can constitute some backgrounds for our later discussions about the Chinese Communist theory.

3.1 Liberals on Representation

For the Liberals, representation is unquestionably about individuals. They believe that each person is the best judge of his own interest – as Bentham puts it, “There is no one who knows what is for your interest, so well as yourself.”¹ Their position is clearly demonstrated in *The Federalist Papers*, which regards “interest” basically as a pluralistic and factious thing with a negative meaning. The individuals’ interests are correlated to “opinions”, therefore they are personal, subjective and unreliable.²

It is true that the Federalists wish to establish a representative government allowing the superior and rational men to achieve “the real welfare of the nation”.

¹ Cited in Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 198.

² Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, & John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), No. 60, 305-309.

The so-called Anti-Federalists oppose such ideas vigorously. They insist that the representatives should be like those whom they represent in order to respond to their needs and demands. The Federalists replies to this “resemblance” view that it is natural for the people to choose superior persons, rather than those who resembles them, to represent them. “The small manufacturer sees that the merchant can represent him in public councils better than he could represent himself. The small landholder sees that his basic interests are shared with and protected by the great landholder. And what is wrong with electing men of conspicuous talents?”³ But it should be noted that the representatives are only to pursue and further the interests of specific districts, groups and classes, not to develop their own ideas about national interest. In this regard, the Federalists and their opponents – both Liberals – do not disagree with each other.

Madison does not have high expectations for the representatives:

It is in vain to say that enlightened statesmen will be able to adjust these clashing interests, and render them all subservient to the public good. Enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm. Nor, in many cases, can such an adjustment be made at all

³ Herbert J. Storing, *What the Anti-Federalists were for* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 43-44.

*without taking into view indirect and remote considerations, which will rarely prevail over the immediate interest which one party may find in disregarding the rights of another or the good of the whole.*⁴

What he hopes for is that there will be enough separate interests brought together to balance and stalemate each other. The representatives' main task is to bring their electors' opinions into the representative bodies and make sure the electors get their fair share in a system of balancing and stalemating, which is "the real safeguard against domestic faction". "The welfare of the nation" is therefore merely a result of the compromise of specific private interests.

For Madison, representatives "does not know his constituents' interests better than they do themselves; if anything, he is in this respect roughly their equal."⁵ Since it is unreliable to entrust one's interest to someone else who has superior political knowledge, the right governmental forms become crucial in order to balance different interests and opinions. Indeed the Liberals do not deny the independence of the representatives, but they emphasize responsiveness

⁴ Hamilton, Madison & Jay, *Federalist Papers*, No.10, 50.

⁵ Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 197.

more. Such theories have laid the foundation of today's representative democracy and parliamentary system.

3.2 Burke on Representation

Edmund Burke's theory of representation is considerably different from that of the Liberals. For Burke, there is always the national interest out there; it is impersonal, objective and above private demands. A special group of educated, rational and virtuous elites have the best (or the only) knowledge about such interest. Because they understand what is best for the represented better than themselves, they must be entrusted with abundant independence from the people. In his "Speech to the Electors of Bristol," he expresses the view that the duty of these elite-representatives is to judge about the national interest:

Parliament is not a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests; which interests each must maintain, as an agent and advocate, against other agents and advocates; but parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole; where, not local purposes, not local prejudices, ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole. You choose a member indeed;

*but when you have chosen him, he is not member of Bristol, but he is a member of parliament.*⁶

Thus his thought about representation is a “natural aristocracy”, with virtue and wisdom, governing for the good of the nation. The ordinary people are selfish and irrational, so it is unnecessary for the representatives to consult the wishes of his constituents to know what to do. For Burke, certain areas in the country can be virtually represented in the parliament even if they are disenfranchised, as long as their interest is shared with other constituencies which do have seats. Therefore the forms of government are never as important to Burke as to the Liberals. However, we will discuss later that such theory of “virtual representation” does not mean the elimination of elections altogether.

Pitkin indicates that Burke

... sees interest very much as we today see scientific fact: it is completely independent of wishes or opinion, of whether we like it or not; it just is so. This means, on

⁶ Edmund Burke, *On Empire, Liberty and Reform: Speeches and Letters*, ed. David Bromwich (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), 55.

*the one hand, that an intelligent, honest representative can find it; and, on the other hand, his constituents eventually will accept it.*⁷

And it is important for us to remember that

*... for representation theorists since Burke's time, political questions are inevitably controversial ones without a right answer, interests are the interests of someone who has a right to help them, and no reliable elite group exists in society.*⁸

In other words, the Liberal views became predominant in post-Burke time.

3.3 Rousseau on Representation

Unlike the Liberals and Burke who have their versions of representation theory, Jean-Jacques Rousseau only has some thoughts about it but not a theory, because he denies the possibility of representation altogether. For him, the people as a virtuous whole constitutes as the sovereign, and

Sovereignty cannot be represented for the same reason that it cannot be alienated; it consists essentially in the general will, and the will does not admit of being represented: either it is the same or it is different; there is no middle ground. ... The deputies of the

⁷ Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 180.

⁸ Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 189.

*people are not and cannot be their representatives; they are merely its agents; they cannot conclude anything definitively.*⁹

Representation is impossible because no one can will for others. Rousseau conspicuously mocks the so-called representative government and the people who believe in it: "The English people thinks it is free; it is greatly mistaken, it is free only during the election of Members of Parliament; as soon as they are elected, it is enslaved, it is nothing."¹⁰ For Rousseau, the ideal political community should be a small one in which people can directly participate in public matters: "Whence it follows that the more the State expands, the more freedom contracts."¹¹ "I do not see that among us the Sovereign can henceforth preserve the exercise of its rights unless the City is very small."¹² Rousseau simply does not believe that a representative (even slightly) independent from the people could still be responsive.

⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. & trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Book III, Chapter 15, 114.

¹⁰ Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book III, Chapter 15, 114.

¹¹ Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book III, Chapter 1, 84.

¹² Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book III, Chapter 15, 114-115.

4. Mao's Theory of Representation

As the chief leader and theorist of the Chinese Communists, Mao Zedong declared without hesitation that "Our People's Government is one that genuinely represents the people's interests, it is a government that serves the people."¹

After reviewing some important Western thoughts on representation, we should now examine the nature of Mao's theory of representation.

4.1 Proletarian Vanguard: the Representatives

The single party (with the government under its control) can claim its representativeness because, above all, it identifies itself as a revolutionary party that grasps the universal truth – Marxism-Leninism, and additionally, Maoism.

As Mao says, "The theoretical basis guiding our thinking is Marxism-Leninism.

"² The Party's official ideologies are the scientific theories and objective laws which defines every person's position in the society and his interest. As Pitkin observes,

¹ "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People,"

http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_58.htm.

² "Strive to Build a Great Socialist Country," Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, accessed March 20, 2014, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_38.htm.

In Marxist theory the interest of a class is objectively determinable whether members of the class know it or not. What benefits a class is to its interest; with the passage of time the members of the class will become aware of theirs. But even before they become "class-conscious," various events may in fact be (or not be) in their class interest; they just do not know it yet. This kind of idea of interests independent of wishes or opinion seems to have flourished in economics, perhaps because profit and loss provide a standard that seems temptingly objective, whether or not somebody wants the profit.³

Under such theory, "interest" is understood in a most abstract and transcendent way; it is defined by one's position in the process of social production. Unlike the Liberals who see people as individuals, the Communists see them as members of several classes. However two people are different, as long as they belong to the same class, they have the common interest; and in a particular period in history, members of different classes may form a coalition and share a uniform interest. Therefore, for the Chinese people in Mao's period (including workers, peasants and the intelligentsia that supported the regime), they shared the same interest, and the Communist Party represented both the interest and the people as both understood in the abstract and general way.

³ Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 158.

Lenin argues that “socialist consciousness does not arise spontaneously in the working class. Proletarians will not automatically secure their own salvation because they literally do not know their own interests.”⁴ Thus, the Party plays a “vanguard” role to represent the people’s interest, and its leadership is beyond question – “The force at the core leading our cause forward is the Chinese Communist Party.”⁵ “The Communist Party is a political party which works in the interests of the nation and people and which has absolutely no private ends to pursue.”⁶ To Mao, the proletarian vanguard is the few that knows the right answers to political questions and forms a “unity of purpose” with the people. It is not only irreplaceable by elections but also responsible to set the goal and agenda for the whole nation in order to achieve the objective national interest. Such goal has been changing all the time, from national liberation (1940s), to economic constructions (1950s), then to communist society (1960s and 70s), and

⁴ Frakt, “Mao’s Concept of Representation,” 689.

⁵ “Strive to Build a Great Socialist Country,”

http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_38.htm.

⁶ “Speech at the Assembly of Representatives of the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region,” Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, accessed March 20, 2014,

http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_05.htm.

finally, after Mao's death, to the comprehensive modernization of the country (1980s to the present).

From such statement we can see clearly that huge gap exists between the Liberal theory of representation and Mao's. Similar to Burke, Mao does not see interest as pluralistic, personal or subjective, but instead, as uniform, objective and beyond personal judgment. To Mao and Burke, politics is not about preferences or compromises, but generally a question of knowledge which requires the representatives to give right answers. As vanguard, the Party members in Mao's theory play a similar role with Burke's natural aristocracy, since both of them contemplate what should be done for the interest of the represented. Meanwhile, governmental forms are relatively unimportant for them. So long as the virtuous few are in control of the political agenda, there is no need for elected representative bodies to balance the separate needs and opinions. In this way, Mao's representatives are entitled to considerable independence.

4.2 Virtuous People: the Represented

But these are just one part of Mao's theory. Although the Party is the vanguard and the representative, the people are far from being irrelevant or

subordinate; rather, they play a significant role. Mao always had enormously high evaluations of the people – “The people, and the people alone, are the motive force of world history.”⁷ The masses are never ignorant or passive, but with impressive wisdom, energy and virtue. “It has to be understood that the masses are the real heroes, while we ourselves are often childish and ignorant, and without this understanding it is impossible to acquire even the most rudimentary knowledge.”⁸ For Mao, the purpose of the Communist Party is to strive for the liberty and happiness of the working people, and it should always take a plebian position: “We should be modest and prudent, guard against arrogance and rashness, and serve the Chinese people heart and soul.”⁹ This so-called “Mass Line” (*Qun zhong lu xian*) constitutes the central part of Mao’s theory of representation. Its operation is described by him in details:

⁷ “On Coalition Government,” Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, accessed March 20, 2014, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_25.htm.

⁸ “The Mass Line,” Quotations from Mao Tse Tung, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/ch11.htm>.

⁹ “China’s Two Possible Destinies,” Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, accessed March 20, 2014, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_24.htm.

In all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily "from the masses, to the masses". This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action. Then once again concentrate ideas from the masses and once again go to the masses so that the ideas are persevered in and carried through. And so on, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time. [sic] Such is the Marxist theory of knowledge.¹⁰

The Party may set the goal or the agenda in general, but to execute specific policies, it should always go into the masses. Only by learning their problems and consulting their opinions can the cadres truly understand their needs. Such process is requisite for the Party to correct its possible errors. The opinions of the masses may be pluralistic and fragmented, but they are in no contradiction with the Marxist ideology; instead, they are only particular examples to prove the

¹⁰ "Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership," Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, accessed March 20, 2014, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_13.htm.

correctness of the universal truth and can compose a picture to show how the theory works in real life.

Facing such virtuous and wise masses, the Party members could never be described as “elites”:

Another hallmark distinguishing our Party from all other political parties is that we have very close ties with the broadest masses of the people. ...policy and style of work invariably conform with the demands of the masses at a given time and place and invariably strengthen our ties with the masses, and the wrong task, policy and style of work invariably disagree with the demands of the masses at a given time and place and invariably alienate us from the masses. The reason why such evils as dogmatism, empiricism, commandism [sic], tailism [sic], sectarianism, bureaucracy and an arrogant attitude in work are definitely harmful and intolerable, and why anyone suffering from these maladies must overcome them, is that they alienate us from the masses.¹¹

It is clear that neither should the Party be the people’s “master” that commands them from above nor should it be the people’s “tail” that follows them from

¹¹ “On Coalition Government,” http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_25.htm.

behind. It is called the “vanguard” because it should lead the people in the front, and it can never properly play this role if it loses the close connections with them.

Thus, despite that Mao and Burke have some similarities in their theories, huge differences exist between the revolutionary leader and the conservative statesman. Most significantly, unlike Burke’s masses who are ignorant, irrational and self-interested, Mao’s masses are those who genuinely possess virtue and wisdom. For Burke a political community is naturally unequal, but for Mao there could not be any group superior to the masses. As proletarian vanguard, Mao’s representatives are no elites; they come from the masses and must repeatedly go back to the masses. Burke’s representatives consult the constituents only to bring topics into the parliament and make their feelings heard, but Mao’s representatives contact the masses to make sure their views could be actually reflected in government policies. Although both kinds of representatives enjoy independence, Mao’s ones are required to be much more responsive to the represented.

Despite that Burke’s virtual representation does not necessarily rely on elections, as Pitkin points out, it needs some institutional arrangements to ensure its permanence: “the only long-range guarantee of the presence of such a spokesman in Parliament, is for some constituency that actually sends a member,

to share the interest”¹² (of the areas that do not have seats). But Mao does not pay any serious attention to the necessity of election for a representative’s work.

4.3 Masses Campaign: the Means of Representation

Mao explicitly reminds the Party of the danger of being alienated from the people due to bureaucracy:

*Our People’s Government is one that genuinely represents the people’s interests, it is a government that serves the people. Nevertheless, there are still certain contradictions between this government and the people. These include the contradictions ... between democracy and centralism, between the leadership and the led, and the contradictions arising from the bureaucratic style of work of some of the state personnel in their relations with the masses.*¹³

How to control such “bureaucratic style of work” and keep the people’s representatives from becoming self-serving oligarchs? Elections would be the solution in a Western representative system. But Mao has little faith in elections: “I don’t believe in elections ... I was elected by Beijing but aren’t there quite a

¹² Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 180.

¹³ “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People,” http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_58.htm.

few people who have never seen me? If they haven't even seen me how can they elect me? It's nothing more than their having heard of my name."¹⁴

These words show that he distrusts of the elections because they provide no direct contact with the people. Mao's theory of representation is possible only through repeated interactions between representatives and the represented. Mao believes that the Party can represent the people and respond to them only if its members communicate with the masses face to face. He connects the representative and the represented with a unique mechanism – masses movement or campaign, or in Chinese, *yundong*.

"Campaigns in China, much like elections in America, are a fundamental political institution. ... for a significantly wide range of issues they afford Chinese citizens an effective vehicle for political participation."¹⁵ Noticing its importance in Mao's politics, Gordon Bennett defines a campaign as "a government-sponsored effort to storm and eventually overwhelm strong but

¹⁴ Cited in John Bryan Starr, *Continuing the Revolution: The Political Thought of Mao* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 212.

¹⁵ Gordon Bennett, *Yundong: Mass Campaigns in Chinese Communist Leadership* (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, 1976), 15.

vulnerable barriers to the progress of socialism through intensive mass mobilization of active personal commitment.”¹⁶

The key factor of a political campaign is mobilization. Large scale of mobilization involves a vast number of cadres and masses and drives them into political sphere, with their ordinary work set aside. People discuss the theme of the campaign and related government policies, vindicate their thoughts on political matters, and make criticism and self-criticism. “Obliging a cadre to engage in direct contact with the masses whom he or she is appointed to serve has positive effects on curbing that cadre’s natural tendencies toward alienation from the masses, self-seekingness, and a bureaucratic style of work.”¹⁷ The Yan’an Rectification Movement (*Yan’an zhengfeng yundong*) is the most famous campaign of this sort.

Also, a campaign may have the function of stimulating the masses’ initiatives and make changes to policies according to their suggestions. Here is an example of how a campaign works to revise government policies. From 1959 to 1961, The Great Leap Forward (*Da yue jin*) led by Mao aimed to rapidly

¹⁶ Bennett, *Yundong*, 18.

¹⁷ Starr, *Continuing the Revolution*, 190.

transform the country into a communist society through radical industrialization and rural reform, but instead caused disastrous economic recession and nationwide famine. Realizing that the Party's policy had severely deviated from the interests of the masses, Mao proposed in January, 1961 that the Party should "energetically encourage the practice of investigation and study" (*daxing diaocha yanjiu zhifeng*). From members of the Politburo to county officials, cadres were sent to factories and villages. By communicating with workers and peasants face-to-face for several months, the Party stopped its reckless behaviors and adjusted its policies according to the masses' needs and demands. Later, the economy underwent a steady recovery. The whole campaign was regarded by Mao as an example of practicing Marxism-Leninism.¹⁸

Masses Campaign makes Mao's theory of representation complete. The relationship between the advanced vanguard and the virtuous masses is "dialectical," and it is inappropriate to choose one side or the other in the tension between independence and responsiveness. Mao's concept of the people as a virtuous entirety is distinctively different from Burke's viewpoints, but it very

¹⁸ "Daxing diaocha yanjiu zhifeng (Energetically Encourage the Practice of Investigation and Study)," *Mao Zedong Wenji* (Selected Articles of Mao Zedong), accessed March 20, 2014, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64185/189968/11568288.html>, translated by the author.

much resembles Rousseau's ideas about the people. Another significant similarity between Mao and Rousseau is that they both believe the importance of people's participation in politics. Rousseau insists that in order to maintain freedom, the people should keep presenting in political life and deciding public matters by themselves. Mao launched the Cultural Revolution in the belief that the Party was moving toward oligarchy and needed a thorough reform from the bottom up. Following the "Mass Line", he called for the masses to crush the political machinery to act for themselves.

Nevertheless, it is inconceivable for Rousseau that the people can live in a large country under a representative system but still keep their freedom. For Mao, the existence of the proletarian vanguard and the operation of the Mass Line through campaigns make representation feasible and beneficial for the represented, even if it is run in a large country.

4.4 Further Considerations

Mao's theory of representation tries to solve the tension between independence and responsiveness in a complex way. He endeavors to establish a representative system without elections but nevertheless connecting the

representatives and the represented. How should we evaluate it? Does it qualify as a satisfactory theory of representation after all?

Pitkin offers a valuable point of view in order to identify a government that is genuinely representative:

*It seems to me that we show a government to be representative not by demonstrating its control over its subjects but just the reverse, by demonstrating that its subjects have control over what it does. ... in a representative government ... the people really do act through their government, and are not merely passive recipients of its actions. ... For in a representative government the governed must be capable of action and judgment, capable of initiating government activity, so that the government may be conceived as responding to them. ... a representative government requires that there be machinery for the expression of the wishes of the represented, and that the government respond to these wishes ...*¹⁹

It may be true that Mao wholeheartedly encourages the people to express their wishes and participate in politics, and his ways for the masses to act

¹⁹ Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 232.

through the government is campaign.²⁰ But Pitkin emphasizes that “there must be a constant condition of responsiveness, of potential readiness to respond ... a dictator might choose to do what his subjects want and nevertheless not be a representative. Only if he institutionalizes this decision, so that there is not merely occasional response when he pleases, but regular, systematic responsiveness, does he become a representative.”²¹ This argument points out the essential weakness of Mao’s “campaign-style” participation. He only started a campaign to respond to the opinions of the masses when he thinks it necessary. When a campaign ended, the access for the masses to participation was closed until the next one began. Even the Cultural Revolution that once paralyzed the whole political system was no more than “a rebellion under (Mao’s) command”. In this way, the claimed popular rule actually collapsed into the rule of the charismatic leader. Pitkin concedes that we “would be reluctant to consider any system a representative government unless it held regular elections, which were

²⁰ Note that an important limitation of campaigns is that they must not be used against the Party’s leadership, the socialist system or Marxist ideology; any behavior of this kind would be ruthlessly repressed. The distinction between “the people” and “the enemies” is whether they support the Party or not.

²¹ Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 233-234.

‘genuine’ and ‘free’.”²² Thus Mao’s theory is obviously not a satisfactory form of representation theory.

On the other hand, we should also remember that by Pitkin, representation is the representative making present of the represented who is nevertheless not literally present; therefore people cannot be called “represented” if they do everything themselves and put their representatives aside. But the Cultural Revolution – as the zenith of all the campaigns – showed that the Mass Line may lead to total anarchy. If pushed to the extreme, Mao’s theory would make the people directly present themselves in political sphere; but if so, it would cease to be a theory of *re*-presentation.

Although he had relatively little to say on the concept of the campaign as a political style, Mao suggested the aim of the campaign-style of politics by the following words: “I stand for the theory of permanent revolution. ... In making revolution one must strike while the iron is hot – one revolution must follow another, the revolution must continually advance,” and “revolutions” here means a succession of campaigns.²³ Pitkin suggests that “Without

²² Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 235.

²³ Cited in Starr, *Continuing the Revolution*, 209.

institutionalization ... the ideal of representation would remain an empty dream, or at most would occasionally recur as a fitful, inexplicable blessing ..."²⁴ Since "permanent revolutions" are exactly the opposite of "institutionalization", we can also say that Mao's theory is not a satisfactory theory of representation in this regard.

²⁴ Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 239.

5. Representation in Post-Mao China, and Its Critics

After Mao's death in 1976, China's enthusiasm for "permanent revolutions" rapidly cooled down. The regime changed its goal (the national goal) from the unrealistic "communist society" to the much more practical "comprehensive modernization". Instead of ideology as in Mao's era, the achievements and performance have become the source of legitimacy of the regime. Deng Xiaoping suggested that compared to Western political systems, China's socialist system has its advantage of "being able to concentrate our forces on a major task,"¹ which is economic development. Its success in this respect has also been acknowledged worldwide.

Nevertheless, although so many changes have happened to the regime, its claim to represent the people has almost remained intact. The latest version of it is the former General Secretary Jiang Zemin's Three Representation theory (*San ge dai biao*):

This experience and the historical experiences gained by the Party since its founding can be summarized as follows: Our Party must always represent the

¹ "Excerpts from Talks Given in Wuchang, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, and Shanghai," accessed March 20, 2014, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/dengxp/vol3/text/d1200.html>.

requirements for developing China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people. These are the inexorable requirements for maintaining and developing socialism, and the logical conclusion our Party has reached through hard exploration and great praxis.²

The core of the statement is the Party's representativeness of "the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people." Including not only workers, peasants and the intelligentsia but also private entrepreneurs, the concept of "people" has an undoubtedly broader meaning than in Mao's era.

Correspondingly, now the Party is not only the vanguard of the proletariat, but also of all the Chinese people and the whole Chinese nation. The Party remains as the vanguard; the people are still a virtuous entirety, and their interest is objective and fundamental as always. In these respects, the current theory of representation of the regime clearly inherits the legacy of Mao.

What has been missing is the connection between the representative and the represented which is crucial for Mao's theory. Since Mao's death, no leader wanted the economic development to be interrupted by political movements

² "Three Represents," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Represents.

again. There have been much fewer campaigns, and their scales have been much smaller than Mao's ones. This lack of campaigns has actually crippled the Communist theory of representation laid by Mao. The Party has become a representative with abundant independence to do its work but insufficient responsiveness to the represented. It takes a paternalistic view that it represents the people because the government takes care of the people's interest and has improved their lives.

Pitkin does not agree with such notion of representation. "... some writers argue that a government is representative to the extent that it pursues the interest of its subjects and looks after their welfare ... ,"

*But the actions of a benevolent dictatorship might be directed toward the welfare of the populace, and make no concessions to anything resembling democratic participation. Surely this would not be a representative government. ... the fact that a government looks after the interests of its subjects is at most a piece of evidence, a necessary but not a sufficient criterion for calling it representative.*³

For Pitkin, a representative government is the one through which the represented can express and act. A system "taking care of" so complete would no

³ Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 229 & 231.

longer be representation at all, and a government like China's has no more legitimacy to claim representativeness than a pre-modern monarchy. Bernard Manin explains how a representative government enables the represented to act through it: the people's freedom to express political opinions prevents the representatives to become "the only actors on the political scene" using their "undemocratic independence," and the regularly held reelections make the representative's actions restrained by popular judgment.⁴ Such mechanisms are still missing from the Chinese theory and system today.

The Communists are confident of the Party's representativeness, because its successes in history seem to endorse their view:

A review of our Party's 70-plus-year history elicits an important conclusion: our Party earned the people's support during the historical periods of revolution, construction and reform because it always represented the requirements for developing China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people. The Party also

⁴ Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Paris: New York University Press and CNRS, 1997), 237.

*earned popular support because it fought tirelessly to realize the fundamental interests of the country and the people by formulating a correct line, principles and policies.*⁵

But not everyone agrees to such positive views. Among the advocates of a Western-style representative government based on elections, a notable one was Zhao Ziyang, former Premier of the Republic (1980-87) and General Secretary of the Party (1987-89). Deposed by Deng in 1989, he tried to make substantive reforms to the political system when in office. Although admitting that he was not going to abandon the Party's leadership, he indicated that he had prepared to adopt regular and direct elections to the national parliament in order to make the single party regime more responsible and responsive to people's demands. He conceded that "we needed to establish multiple channels for dialogue – with various social factions, forces, and interests. Decisions on major issues should be made with ongoing consultation and dialogue with various social groups, not just within the Communist Party."⁶ Such an attitude is impressive because it shows that he had given up the idea that the whole nation had an objective and uniform interest. Instead, he recognized the existence of multiple, pluralistic

⁵ "Three Represents," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Represents.

⁶ Bao Pu, Renee Chiang & Adi Ignatius, ed. & trans., *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Zhao Ziyang* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 258.

interests among the people. Also, the Party for him was no longer Mao's vanguard which "has absolutely no private ends to pursue", but rather a political force with its own interests. This position on interest might be seen as prerequisite for his views on the government's responsiveness and the necessity of elections.

Once climbed up to the very top of the political hierarchy in China, Zhao frankly spoke of his disillusionment on the Communists' claim of representativeness after deposition:

I once believed that people were the masters of their own affairs not in the parliamentary democracies of the developed nations in the West, but only in the Soviet and socialist nations' systems with a people's congress, making the latter system more advanced and a better-realized form of democracy.

This, in fact, is not the case. The democratic systems of our socialist nations are all just superficial; they are not systems in which the people are in charge, but rather are ruled by a few or even a single person.⁷

He warned that if a country does not establish an electoral representative democracy, "it will run into the situations that have occurred in so many

⁷ Bao, Chiang & Igantius, *Prisoner of the State*, 269.

developing countries, including China: commercialization of power, rampant corruption, a society polarized between rich and poor.”⁸

He, too, used historical argument to support his position. But his version of China’s recent history is far from ideal. We have said that a representative’s responsiveness is related to him not being a self-serving oligarch, and it may not be a coincidence that Zhao regarded the lack of an electoral representative system as the reason why China has evolved into a polarized society controlled by the corrupted few.

Zhao’s concerns with the Party’s insufficient responsiveness to the people are shared by some insiders. Xi Jinping, current General Secretary of the Party and President of the Republic, mentioned in his first public address as supreme leader in November, 2012 saying that

It is the people who create history. The masses are the real heroes. Our strength comes from the people and masses. We deeply understand that the capability of any individual is limited, but as long as we unite as one, there is no difficulty that we cannot

⁸ Bao, Chiang & Igantius, *Prisoner of the State*, 270.

*overcome. Individuals have limited time in work, but there is no limit in serving the people wholeheartedly.*⁹

It seems that he wishes to imitate Mao more than in language. In 2013, a new movement called “Mass Line Campaign” (*Qunzhong luxian jiaoyu*) was started with the aim of exposing the officials to people’s advice, criticism and whistle-blowing. But however determined Xi is, his campaign is merely a pale shadow of Mao’s vigorous movements. Basically it only involves the cadres and employees of the government. The mobilization of the ordinary people is so little that the campaign does not even qualify as a “masses campaign”.

⁹ “Full text: China's new party chief Xi Jinping's speech,” BBC News, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-20338586>.

6. Conclusion

“[R]epresenting here means acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them. The representative must act independently; his action must involve discretion and judgment; he must be the one who acts. The represented must also be (conceived as) capable of independence action and judgment, not merely be taken care of.”¹ Although endeavoring to give a clear and convincing definition of representation, Pitkin concedes that it is one of the most ambiguous concepts in political sphere – people may use the same notion to describe completely different things.

Today, China is the largest one of the few countries in the world that have not adopted a Western-style representative government based on regular and direct elections. Yet the regime continues to claim its representativeness of the people and has its own theory of it. We have made some elementary comparisons between this theory and theories about representation by the Western thinkers and found some illuminating differences and similarities. We can see that Mao’s theory is distinctively different from the Liberal theory. But he shares the ideas with Burke that the exceptional representatives should have the

¹ Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 209.

independence to act for the general interest of the people, and the views with Rousseau that the virtuous people should actively participating in public matters. From these respects, Mao's theory does have some real meanings as a theory of representation.

The most unique part in Mao's theory is masses campaign as the means to make representation a reality. Mao believes that repeated face-to-face contacts between the vanguard and the masses are essential to avoid cadres' bureaucracy and encourage people's participation, and thus enable the Party to achieve its representation of the people. But as we have seen, due to its random and non-institutionalized character as well as its tendency towards anarchy, Mao's campaign-style representation is far from a stable representative system.

As campaigns have largely faded out from political life in post-Mao China, the Communist theory of representation is now even less self-consistent; instead, it has become a paternalistic theory claiming to represent the people by looking after their welfare. Furthermore, however the regime's theory of representation evolves through decades, its policies seem to be seriously at odds with the represented from time to time. Situations like Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution and the present oligarchic society all make the effect of the Communist representation questionable.

The single party regime's fate is unknown. But its theory of representation is worth study – although it is in many ways problematic. Not only does it help us understand the nature of the regime, but it also contributes to our general understanding of political representation as a crucial topic in political theory.

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